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Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

The AARP appreciates the opportunity to participate in the thirty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development and to speak on behalf of older persons worldwide. The Association is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, with a membership of 32 million persons.

Through our programme, Coalition 99, which functioned as an international clearinghouse for the International Year of Older Persons, we are uniquely aware of the many events, activities, programmes and proclamations that took place in celebration of the Year. We received information from all corners of the globe, from cities, villages, individuals and groups. We received so much information that it was impossible to publish it all.

Those events, activities and programmes are the celebratory, the awareness-raising outcome of the Year. From our Coalition 99 experience we would say that the Year was a big success. Now comes the hard part, developing, planning and implementing strategies that will give us, all of us, rich and poor, young and old, men and women, in developed and developing countries alike, a real "Society for All Ages", the goal and theme of the Year.

In order to achieve that goal, the reality of that theme, the time has come to take stock of where we are and what tools we currently have to bring us towards that goal.

The Vienna Plan of Action currently serves as a guideline, a baseline, if you will. While there is still much in the Plan that remains valid, there is little that accurately reflects the realities of today's world, notably the accelerated ageing of populations, especially in the developing world.

We believe that the time has come when the Plan cannot simply be reviewed but must also be renewed, put into the context of the twenty-first century. Included in the new plan, if it is to continue to serve as a guideline, must be the results of lessons learned, the possible application of technologies newly available as potential solutions and, most importantly it must include the principle of human-centred development necessary for the creation of a "Society for All Ages".

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We hope that the Commission will take the necessary steps to provide a forum for the renewal of the Plan of Action, one in which all interested actors can participate, as well as an infrastructure which will assure that an up to date Plan can truly serve as a valid guideline that can lead us to a real Society for All Ages.

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

The International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres a non-governmental organization (NGO in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, thanks the Chairman for this opportunity to address the Commission with respect to agenda items 3 (a) and 3 (b). We wish first to congratulate the Secretariat for the substantively excellent and readable report on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development, and to support its conclusions.

Many of the concerns we wish to raise here we presented to the substantive session of the Council last summer, but we believe they need reintroduction in relation to the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly. We are submitting our suggestions in the hope that Governments will incorporate them in their respective activities. Our statement is limited to four specific areas. The first concerns the delivery of a broad range of social services, designed to meet the local level needs of persons living in poverty and open avenues to resources that can improve their living conditions. The second area deals with the financial and related tools, utilized by NGOs such as settlement and neighbourhood centres, in furnishing micro-credit to low income individuals and vulnerable groups. The third area is the identification and use of social indicators that are more qualitative and appropriate for the measurement of local social needs than those currently in use. Finally, we stress the importance of providing information about community development programmes to neighbouring and other communities facing similar problems. Such information should include examples of both successful and unsuccessful measures, dealing with various vulnerable groups, including refugees and migrants.

Neighbourhood community centres have historically provided a wide range of social services to meet the needs of the community. The experience of such centres, the earliest of which, over 100 years ago, were Toynbee Hall in East London, the University Settlement in New York City and Hull House in Chicago, provides guidelines for the establishment of multi-service organizations capable of evaluating community needs and furnishing appropriate services. Today similar organizations are operating worldwide. (The network of our organization includes groups seeking to operate such services in 61 countries.) From a practical point of view, social services rendered at the local level are an essential tool to achieve social

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protection, but they must be rendered in such a way as to meet the needs of the particular environment of the community. They should be adjusted to national and local requirements. In some countries social services provided by NGOs are primarily financed by the private sector, while in others they are financed by the Government – either national or local. Comprehensive basic services should include strengthening of community organizations, provision of services specifically designed for vulnerable groups, such as battered women's shelters, treatment for substance abuse, day care for children and the elderly, to help families in need, mental health services and specialized services for migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. These examples are, of course, in addition to health services and education, which have been generally recognized as basic social services. United Nations practice has, however, tended to marginalize vocational training and to interpret education narrowly instead of calling for a wide range of educational services, such as those provided by NGOs. Appropriate training is needed to meet the employment needs of vulnerable persons, as are appropriate welfare programmes and related social services. We ask that these concepts of social services activities be included in the discussions of the Commission and hopefully in the documentation to be provided to the Preparatory Committee.

Second, local banks and other funding sources should be encouraged to make funds available to NGOs, such as local community centres and settlement houses, for grants and low interest loans. Many of these organizations have established credit unions and similar agencies which have experience in administering such programmes. These local establishments have ongoing projects and experience in evaluating the needs and accountability of local beneficiaries, many of whom would be hesitant about seeking funds directly. The experience of many western countries should be linked to the experience of NGOs such as Trickle Up, as well as the Grameen Bank, to organize micro-credit and micro-enterprise activities to make resources available to persons living in poverty. This aspect of community financing was given great publicity two years ago but has not been implemented on the timetable outlined at the first Micro-Credit Summit. The International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres therefore urges that serious consideration be given by the Commission to the inclusion in their recommendations of provisions for the expansion of NGO participation in developing appropriate micro-credit mechanisms.

NGOs have long advocated the use of social indicators as a mechanism for evaluating programmes dealing with social development. NGOs at the United Nations have participated in the various technical discussions of indicators and have emphasized the values of qualitative indicators and the utility of sampling at the local level in addition to the quantitative indicators. We appreciate the new efforts of the World Bank in enlarging their field experience by collecting observational data along the same lines as has been carried out by settlement houses and other community-based organizations. NGOs have had long experience in using social indicators in evaluating and reporting to donors the effects of interventions in the community of specific projects. We urge the Commission to support the use of a variety of social indicators in addressing the implementation of the World Social Summit. We would be happy to work with those concerned in developing indicators that would be more appropriate in evaluating the effectiveness of social programmes.

Finally there is a need for exchange of information among communities dealing with both community needs and community experiences. This concept is closely connected to the concept of partnership in the implementation of United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of various social groups. The Federation has undertaken many exchange programmes bringing the knowledge on social work from one community to another. For example, the Federation has sponsored a series of projects dealing with social work training, with special emphasis on family issues. One provides for sending social workers from Canada to train and educate social work candidates in Lithuania. Another project has brought Venezuelan students to work in settlement houses in the United States of America on issues such as early childhood education. Still another example is a project in Albania to train volunteers to provide needed social services under the auspices of a coalition of NGOs. Cross-cutting projects between communities are often designed to give assistance to migrants as well as to internally displaced persons. Here the experience of many settlement houses and neighbourhood centres goes back to their establishment, where dealing with the problems of migrants (both internal and international) was their first

objective. We urge the Commission to consider giving a substantive role to NGOs such as the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres in planning partnership programmes for assistance to vulnerable groups, including migrants and displaced persons. We would be prepared to make our expert knowledge in this area available at the international as well as national levels.

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities), the International Council on Social Welfare, the International Council of Women, the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, the International Federation on Ageing, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; the International Federation for Home Economics, the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, the World Movement of Mothers, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Council; and the Armenian International Women's Association and the Armenian Relief Society; non-governmental organizations on the Roster of the Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The signatory non-governmental organizations (NGOs) listed above are active participants in the NGO Committee on the Family. As Governments and NGOs meet for the Commission for Social Development this year, we would like to call attention to the issues of concern to the family, the basic unit of society. This is in keeping with General Assembly resolution 52/81 of 12 December 1997, which affirmed that "follow-up to the International Year of the Family should be an integral part of the multi-year programme of the work of the Commission for Social Development". Mainstreaming of family issues in all discussions for social development remains vital.

The Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives stated in its report on its first session that the World Summit for Social Development insisted that people must be at the centre of sustainable development and that, therefore, people must have the right and ability to participate fully in the economic, political and social life of their societies.[1]

As the Preparatory Committee plans for the General Assembly's special session in June 2000, to review the five-year progress of the Copenhagen Summit for Social Development, we, the NGO signers of this statement, wish to highlight key goals for the basic unit of all societies, the family:

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(1) Assuring that Governments maintain and implement the commitments made in Copenhagen to protect the family and to increase access to sustainable livelihoods for all families;

(2) Advocating, especially in accord with the emphasis rightly given to eradicating poverty, that disadvantaged families be a priority of this protection and this access to livelihoods. In addition, priority must be given to developing universally acceptable social indicators which will measure meaningful progress of families' lives. As stated by the Preparatory Committee at its first session: "Recognizing that efforts to eradicate poverty are necessarily long-term ... nevertheless ... progress to reach this goal has been erratic and slow, and well over a billion people still live in abject poverty. Poverty eradication must remain central to all development strategies and in policy-making at all levels. The approach should be holistic, multi-pronged and broad-based".[2] It is of paramount importance that we continually strive to maintain the goal of "basic social services for all.";

(3) Urging that the further initiatives taken by Governments and civil society provide income sufficient for families, through sustainable, decent and freely chosen employment, whether in agriculture, commerce or industry, in order to advance the third pillar of Copenhagen, social integration of family members in their own community and culture.

While progress in social development has been made in some areas in the past five years, the growing gap between rich and poor has widened for many of the 4.4 billion people in the developing nations. These families lack adequate food, clean water and basic sanitation. Their housing is sub-standard, and access to health services and schooling is non-existent or meagre. In these conditions, clearly, the role of natural adult support to nurture children is severely compromised or made impossible.

As NGOs dedicated to supporting the efforts of very poor families to survive and to keep their families together, we are particularly concerned by measures taken that tend to separate family members solely because of their poverty. In countries in all parts of the world, whether industrialized, developing or those with economies in transition, polices have been observed that tend to separate family members, for example when arranging emergency shelter for the homeless, or when identity papers are not in order. In countries with more funding for social services, poor children too often languish in foster or institutional care, as funds are cut for the preventative programmes that could keep families intact. Even in a well-developed country, *The New York Times* reports:

> "Of the children who end up in foster care, almost every family is poor. ... Most children, especially those who have not been seriously neglected, are severely hurt by the loss of their family. ... Moreover, three-quarters of all children in foster care are returned to their parents within three years. This statistic raises serious questions. Did the children need to be removed in the first place? And were they returned as quickly as they could have been?"[3]

This article, referring to the situation in one country, is also very relevant to other industrialized countries, as well as to the countries with less funding, but which are nevertheless aiming to emulate these policies. Their disastrous results for many poor children deserve greater attention, leading to restraint and more emphasis on preventive services.

We would also like to commend a positive initiative. "Education, communication and information technology and families" was the area examined at the 1998 United Nations workshop on technology and families, held in Dublin. Its conclusions specifically stated, "The family is more than a primary source of education. Its more significant role is in providing children with important initial sets of values. The first relates to social interaction, where the family provides both examples and a discussion forum in which learning can occur. The second relates to those concerning the value of education, which sows the seeds of life-long learning. Life-long learning must begin in the home".[4] This workshop was organized by the Family Unit of the Secretariat of the United Nations, which plays a significant role as facilitator for global efforts on behalf of families and which should be reinforced by the Commission.

The collaboration and cooperation of NGOs on the regional, national and international level is imperative for achieving goals for the well-being of families throughout the world. We are looking towards all Governments and NGOs to achieve the following additional goals for family-friendly policies, in order to improve everyday life:

- Addressing disability issues as they relate to family needs;
- Maintaining support to families with evolving needs, for example children being taken care of by grandparents or other relatives owing to natural or other disasters;
- Responding to the needs of the ageing population within the family unit.

As emphasized above, eradicating poverty is of primary importance in the efforts to build a family-friendly society and, therefore, in attaining other goals for families around the world.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 45* (A/54/45), annex, part III, para. 1.

[2] *Ibid.*, para. 13.

[3] Guggenheim, Martin, "Sometimes Foster Care is the Easy Way Out", *The New York Times*, 8 July 1998.

[4] United Nations workshop on technology and families, Dublin, 6-10 October 1998 (p. 6, item 37).